

# Soldiers protect the past TO ENSURE ITS FUTURE

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**Army National  
Guard Captain  
takes a personal  
interest in  
protecting an  
international  
archeological  
treasure**



*(Above) Soldiers and their Iraqi guides walk through the temple area of the Hatra ruins during a survey site visit. (Left) Captain Jesse Ballenger, logistics officer, 153rd Field Artillery Brigade, points out an inscription in Aramaic on the wall of one of the few excavated areas in the ancient site of Hatra.*





**E**ven as he is mired in the present concerns of coordinating logistics for Q-West Base Complex, Capt. Jesse Ballenger, 153rd Field Artillery Brigade, has one eye on the future.

Ballenger keeps another eye on the past, a consequence of his ongoing studies in archaeology as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Arizona.

With his current project at the Hatra ruins, the Army National Guardsman is bringing together his military and civilian skills to facilitate the construction of a fence to protect and preserve the 2,000-year-old site.

Accompanied by a team of engineers from the 412th Engineer Command under the 130th Engineer Brigade, and the local Iraqi Army commander, Ballenger visited the site July 14 to complete the design for a protective fence that will encircle the entire site, including currently unexcavated areas.

"If all goes well in Iraq, energy and archaeological tourism [will be] the two big industries," said Ballenger. As one of the most famous ancient sites, Hatra could be a draw for the tourism industry in the area.

Col. Ra'ad, commander, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division Iraqi Army, gave his full endorsement to the project. As he and Ballenger traveled around the perimeter and through one of the few sites excavated

in the 1970s, Ra'ad shared stories of the previous work of archaeologists in the area, as well as the ancient legend of how the fortified city-state fell to the invading Sassanids around 241 A.D.

Colonel Daniel Prine, commander, Detachment 8, 412th ENCOM, made notes on the location and design of the fence, as Ballenger notated a series of global positioning system, or GPS, points around the perimeter.

Inside the site, amidst the rolling hills of sand covering unexcavated houses, streets, walls and civilization, Prine's team of engineers recorded a series of seven different possible sites for permanent markers.

Although a dust storm severely limited visibility, the satellite coverage enabling the GPS markers was good, according to Sgt. Roger D. Ashley, engineer technician. The next group of surveyors will be able to use this information to do a more precise survey and map of the site, which will be necessary before excavations can begin and will happen after the fence is built.

"You start with the map," said Ballenger. Once archaeologists have a good topographical understanding of the site, they can understand it spatially, better conceptualize the site formation processes and ad-

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***Colonel Ra'ad, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division Iraqi Army commander, leads American Soldiers through one of the few excavated areas in the Hatra ruins July 14.***





***Captain Jesse Ballenger, logistics officer, 153rd Field Artillery Brigade, squints into a dust storm as he plots a GPS point on the perimeter of the Hatra ruins.***

dress other archaeological concerns.

Ashley, a Vicksburg, Miss., reservist who is a railroad conductor/brakeman for the Kansas City Southern, said he did not expect the site surveyors to have too many problems with the GPS, and they will hopefully have better visibility.

Although some parts of the fence in the area around the front gate might be salvageable, most of the old concrete posts have crumbled into the dirt, and the old barbed wire is twisted into a tangled mass. Prine, who as a civilian works as a project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Colombia, made careful notes about what might be usable.

In the coming weeks, Ballenger hopes that the fence design and funds for the construction will be approved by Multi-National Corps-Iraq.

"There's much work to do," Ballenger said.

Hatra is one of only two sites in Iraq inscribed on the World Heritage List, which recognizes natural and cultural sites that have outstanding universal value, according to Ballenger. Conserving and excavating the site is a "big picture" step in Iraq, although right now the process is in the "baby step" stage, he explained.

Ballenger has been in contact with archaeologists in the international community who will be interested in contributing to the excavation of the Hatra ruins, once the security situation has improved and archaeologi-

cal activity is once again feasible.

In the meantime, a protective fence would go a long way toward protecting and conserving the artifacts and structures on the site. A brackish pond on the site that has seen recent treasure hunting may hold clues to everyday life due to the fact that "people have been tossing things in here for millennia," said Ballenger.

The rebuilt Temple of Shamash is an oft-visited site for Soldiers stationed in the Nineveh Province of Iraq. Saddam Hussein sponsored the excavation and reconstruction of the temple, leaving his mark in the form of bricks prominently imprinted with his initials in stylized Arabic script. Col. Ra'ad remembers trucks arriving and loading up hundreds of ancient statues of gods and goddesses for safe transport to the Iraqi National Museum.

In addition to international archaeologists interested in getting their hands dirty on the site, the big push is to enable Iraqi archaeologists to begin working at the site again.

"The Iraqi government has excellent antiquities laws on the books," said Ballenger. With the current security situation, the difficulty may be enforcing these laws.

Until that time, Ballenger, the engineers, the local Iraqis and those with an interest in the site hope that a protective fence may preserve the history and culture until it can once again be uncovered for the world.

